







THE  
**Conscience of A Nation**  
OR  
**STUDIES IN GANDHIISM**

**GAGANVIHARI MEHTA**

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**1933**

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## PREFACE

Political philosophers discuss the problem of the General Will. Politicians, being more practical, seek to organise public opinion. Only a prophet or an apostle or a martyr can rouse national conscience. Such a one is Gandhiji. He is not content merely to be the captain of his own soul; he is the herald of a scheme of values, of a philosophy of life. His whole existence is a continuous moral protest against the violation of conscience in any sphere of life. He is the great crusader on behalf of conscience.

To Gandhiji, conscience is the ultimate criterion, the final sanction. It is not caprice, not a stray un-co-ordinated impulse; it is the instructed moral sense, the profounder rationality which is in harmony with the whole personality. It determines right and wrong, it is the reservoir of moral strength, the final safeguard of moral conduct, a fundamental of life which cannot be surrendered. In his conception, every individual is, above all, a moral being and the most vital contribution a man can make to society is the exercise of his moral faculties. “The only permanent safeguard of democratic government,” observes Prof. Harold Laski, “is that the unchanging and ultimate sanction of intellectual decision should be the conscience”.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Authority in the Modern State.*

Nevertheless, the one thing which authority, whether political, social, religious or economic, tends instinctively to fear is the insistence of conscience. Yet, as Prof. Laski has emphasised, "no State is ever securely founded save in the consciences of its citizens".<sup>2</sup>

The conscience of Gandhiji is a stern master. It bids him deny the sovereignty of any authority save that to which it gives sanction, it sets a limit to the control which external power can exercise over him. "Physical liberty may be taken from a man," says Bertrand Russell, "but spiritual liberty is his birthright which all the armies and governments of the world are powerless to deprive him without his co-operation".<sup>3</sup> That is precisely the premise on which Gandhiji's scheme is based. His obedience therefore is not servile docility nor is his co-operation an effortless acquiescence. The consent of his conscience must always be won. His whole life is an assertion of what Prof. Laski has admirably described in another context as "the supremacy of that last inwardness of the human mind which resists all authority save its own conviction of rectitude".<sup>4</sup>

But Gandhiji's conscience is not merely the arbiter of his own life. It has shaped for over a decade and a half the destiny of a people. He has become the moral barometer of our times. He enters politics because his

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<sup>2</sup> *Dangers of Obedience and Other Essays.*

<sup>3</sup> *Justice in War Time.*

<sup>4</sup> *Authority in the Modern State.*

conscience revolts against the Punjab wrongs ; he suspends non-co-operation because it is outraged by Chauri-Chaura ; he fasts for three weeks in 1924 because communal riots *hurt* his conscience and in 1932 because it cannot *bear* the segregation of the “untouchables” from the Hindu fold. And to-day he is undergoing a fierce ordeal apparently because his conscience cannot sufficiently awaken the dull conscience of Hinduism. For freedom of conscience involves as its obverse the obligation of conscientiousness. Because his conscience is ever sensitive and alert and energetic, there is no moral apathy, there is no spiritual vacuum in his life. It is ceaseless questioning, endless wrestling. Nor is the public permitted to have an attitude of equanimity. When Gandhiji’s conscience consents, a great political organisation co-operates ; what it disapproves, his large following is prepared to resist. To win its approval is the cherished desire of many ; to avoid its displeasure, people are prepared to go to any length. For he exercises a moral restraint on our selfishness and hatreds and pettiness. He is a moral tonic which braces up a whole people. His conscience, in fine, is a nation’s mentor. You cannot be indifferent to its subtle and often inscrutable workings unless you are indifferent to all that makes life worth living and gives it a meaning. On more occasions than one and in a real sense has he become, in Romain Rolland’s words, the conscience of India.

These nine sketches of Gandhiji cover a period of ten years and were written and published on various occasions which will be evident. The reader will find that there is some amount of repetition and overlapping in some portions and were they to be re-written now, some of them—such as, for instance, on Gandhiji and Lenin—could be amplified. But I have kept them in the form in which they first appeared in order to preserve intact their original spirit. I am fully conscious of my limitations in dealing with a figure like Gandhiji and a subject like Gandhiism. But these glimpses and sketches are only tributes of a humble and unworthy admirer of Gandhiji and of one who has attempted to study the philosophy of Gandhiism in a spirit of reverence even when not able to comprehend it fully.

If this booklet realises any amount above its cost, the sum will be handed over to Sreeyut Devadas Gandhi for devoting it to the movement for the emancipation of the Harijans.

GAGANVIHARI MEHTA.

CALCUTTA,  
15th May, 1933.

# I

## MAHATMA GANDHI

“We live in a very low state of the world and pay unwillingly tribute to Governments founded on force. There is not, among the most religious and instructed men of the most religious and civil nations, *a reliance on the moral sentiment* and a sufficient belief in the unity of things to persuade them that society can be maintained without artificial restraints. . . . What is strange too there never was in any man sufficient faith in the power of rectitude to inspire him with the broad design of renovating the State on the principle of right and love. . . . I do not recall a single human being who has steadily denied the authority of the laws on the simple ground of his own moral nature.”—*Emerson.*\*

It has been said that men waited all these generations for Christ and when he came they crucified him; and if he would come again, they would crucify him again. It is not more than five hundred days ago that the door closed on one such great soul and our modern Pilates had their way. If we had to count the benefactors of humanity within the last hundred years, is there any doubt that Mahatma Gandhi’s name would be among the first half-a-dozen? Indeed, even if Mahatma Gandhi had achieved nothing, even if he had not roused a nation, fallen into a slough, to a sense of its rights, even if he had not thrown out a challenge to a great Empire relying simply on his

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\**Essay on ‘Politics’.*

conscience, even if he had not defied the very basis of international life by rejecting the gospel of force, even if he had not taught us that the final instrument of a true reformer is the purification of the springs of conduct rather than the erection of legal hedges, he would have been a great man.

The secret of his great hold on the vast masses of men is not so much the tremendous moral philosophy that lies behind his politics as the irresistible fascination which an ascetic nature has for the people of the East. The unsophisticated amongst us flock to revere one who has embraced poverty and renounced worldly goods, one whose chastity and purity are the envy of his fellow-men. They may be superstitious. Are they any more away from the light than the thousands who gamble at race courses, seek sensations in divorce scandals and filthy newspaper stories and are jealous of multi-millionaire "oil" magnates and "soap" kings? To such people, Mahatma Gandhi naturally seems crude because he is ignorant of the arts of political manœuvring, and fanatical because his moral principles do not hang about him as loosely as Falstaff's gown. The politics of such a man is, indeed, only his spiritual autobiography writ large. That may have its weaknesses: but it has the supreme merit of elevating such a philosophy of the second-best as that of politics, making its meaning more profound by realising the ends of things and leaving a real impress on the character of the generations to come. It need not be emphasised here how Mahatma Gandhi breathed a quality into the atmosphere of our public life which it lacked most and needed most—the quality of a lofty moral fervour. When he touched politics, he touched them with a certain emotional spiri-

tuality that made us look upon it more as a means to a moral purpose, and less as a game of petty antagonisms. And it is this very sense of purpose that made him look beyond the immediate needs, beyond the limitations of the hour. Hail to "law and order," cried the Moderate! "To what end?" asked the Mahatma, "and preserved by what means?" "More production and yet more production," said the economist and the businessman. "For what human needs" asked the Mahatma, "at what cost—human and æsthetic?" There cannot, indeed, be any doubt that he will live as a memorable figure in the records of our times. For, he has shown that a personality may be as powerful a force in the world as ideas and projects.

It would be interesting to enquire whether there are two or even more Gandhis: the one a politician relying on his shrewdness, the other a moral philosopher relying on his saintliness. It would also be interesting to analyse the strange blending in him of the Eastern with the Western modes of thinking. It would be again interesting to find out what elements in Mahatma Gandhi's thinking are predominantly emotional and what primarily logical: how he thinks and feels at the same time as all great souls do. It would be no less interesting to discover what his distinctive contribution is to our political life, our economic, social and educational organisations: how much of that contribution is original, how much the result of re-interpretation of old ideas in the light of his own peculiar outlook and of presentation of things with the moral backing of his personality and his idealism. Non-violence, for instance, is, in Indian polities, his most vital and original contribution. Between anarchic crimes, on the one hand, and praying and petitioning, on the other, there seemed no middle way.

Extremist nationalists wanted to shoot and throw bombs, and timid lawyer-politicians wanted to make speeches and pass resolutions. "Sane" people thought that either India would have to fight the West with the weapons of the West or to submit to it. The danger in one was loss of individuality and perhaps, of civilisation : in the other, loss of freedom. But Mahatma Gandhi has shown us a way out of this unhappy dilemma and if we imbibe his gospel, we may wear our own garbs and yet face the West as an equal. But take Hindu-Muslim unity or untouchability. Mahatma Gandhi was not the originator of these ideas : he simply put them on a moral basis and in such deeply emotional terms as to convey their immense importance to every heart and every cottage. The oft-repeated charge against him that he wanted to achieve the impossible, that is, to alter human nature, is shallow ; for he wanted not to alter human nature but to bring its best elements into play. And that is a very different thing to do. Here, indeed, modern psychology which looks upon the human mind as a bundle of neutral impulses is with him. For, if you provide the right stimulus, the right response is likely to come. Almost any instinct may take different courses according to the nature of the outlets which it finds. The instinct which makes a man an artist may, if suppressed, make him an adulterer or a murderer. Therefore, when Mahatma Gandhi asks us to trust and to love, he has more even of bookish learning behind him than those learned-ignorant who distrust human nature. To be a true follower of the Mahatma is, indeed, not easy. It requires intensity of faith no less than capacity to suffer : it requires zeal for truth and courage of conviction and manhood. But even weak and vacillating minds can find comfort in

his gospel. For, in so far as we try to practise the religion of love and of truth, of charity and tolerance, of humility and intellectual honesty, we are, in however humble a sphere, carrying on the message of Mahatma Gandhi.

*June 18, 1923.*

## II

### THE PRISONER OF YERAVDA.

O white innocence  
That thou shouldst wear the mask of guilt to hide  
Thine awful and serenest countenance  
From those who know thee not!

—Shelley.

It is exactly a year and a half to-day since a figure, for whose like humanity will have to wait for generations to come, was condemned to the solitude of a prison. Mahatma Gandhi has met the fate of those who deny unjust authority on the simple ground of their own moral nature. Those who refuse to acquiesce in a moral wrong, wherever they see one, must be prepared to suffer at the hands of those whose interest or desire it is to defend it. If you mean to alter the world through love and innocence, be ready to be hated and censured. That is the paradox of the philosophy of non-resistance and it requires no small faith and courage to face the calumny of society while seeking to renovate it. Yet there is a solace in the fact that every judgment that is thus pronounced on an upholder of truth is, ultimately and unconsciously, a judgment on the prevailing order itself. When a Gandhi pleads guilty, it is the existing political system that seems to be condemned. Men feel in the depths of their souls that there is surely something inherently wrong with a social arrangement which continues to pay a pension to Dyer but silences a saint for six years. They may not be able to remove the

wrong immediately: they may not even fully realise whether the ultimate responsibility rests on the powers that be or on their own moral weakness which allows those powers to continue. But the conviction of injustice becomes implanted in their consciousness no less than in the daily practice of the best men and women. In this the *Satyagrahi* has his final reward and in this Mahatma Gandhi has become, as M. Romain Rolland admirably puts it, "the conscience of India."

But to praise the Mahatma is simplicity itself and has become a common-place of the day. To translate his message into our lives is a harder task. Shall he suffer the fate of the great spiritual leaders—to be worshipped but not to be followed? The danger, indeed, is not imaginary. It is more so in a country where national temperament is more authoritarian than critical and where religious traditions and social conventions alike tend to stereotype ideas into dogmas and to crystallise spiritual inspiration into ceremonials. Of all the political phenomena succeeding the Mahatma's arrest, the one which is both characteristic and pathetic is the exploitation of Gandhiji's saying by rival parties to support their own case. The tremendous moral experiment initiated by him is liable to degenerate into a pharisaical cult devoid of that personal moral fervour which alone made it vital. Partly, that was inevitable. Non-co-operation was not a national movement apart from Gandhiji's personality but only the last political expression of it. It cannot be emphasised too often that Gandhiji's politics is, after all, only his spiritual autobiography writ large. Even as his philosophy is the product of his deepest intuitions, his social outlook is the result of constant and assiduous introspection. All this lent a moral

force and a personal background to Non-co-operation that stood in good stead so long as the Mahatma was free. When his personality was removed, what had been its psychic creation naturally suffered. It is the strength as well as the weakness of a spiritual movement that besides an intense belief in its principles, it requires a great man to vitalise and interpret it constantly through his own personality. Say what we may, it is, above all, the personal example that inspires us through the ages—of a Buddha, a Mahomed, a Christ : it is not without reason that Aristotle in his *Ethics* makes a “truly virtuous man” our final guide to virtue and the final arbiter of the criteria of virtue. When, therefore, such a man is removed, the movement that he led becomes less a tendency than a cult.

But if Non-co-operation proves to be not a final deliverance but a reprieve, the moral loss to humanity will be incalculable. For, it is the first genuine application of the Sermon on the Mount to international relations and embodies the most important contribution of modern India to world-polities. It is not known if the rumours of the award of the Nobel Prize for Peace to the Mahatma have any foundation ; but it is impossible to think of any worthier recipient of it at the present day. Gandhiji’s doctrine of non-violence is a rejection of the very basis of human settlement as involved in an appeal to physical force and proceeds logically and inevitably from his insistence on the primary need of respect for conscience in the organisation of our institutions. It is, as a consequence, against every attempt that implies the degradation of human conscience that he is adamant : and it is the essence of his creed to deny that violence and justice can ever go hand in hand. What dragged him into politics was not the

lust of power or the love of antagonism but his refusal to submit to the challenge to national self-respect thrown out by the Punjab episode: he *could not* bear the insult. What hurt him most was not the personnel of the existing system or even its policy but its denial of a moral purpose. He saw the social system based upon an inhuman practice like “untouchability”, the industrial system upon the glorification of greed, the imperial system upon domination and exploitation. All these were one in that they refused a place to conscience in their organisations and it was against this refusal that he valiantly fought. But he fought with a clean weapon that baffled his opponents and surprised his supporters. The world, exhausted and disillusioned by violence and the evils bred by violence, turned with hope and joy to this new gospel: to the savants of Europe, Gandhi personified India. Will the world cast the new Messiah where it has cast the old ones and find out—too late, perchance—the truth of what he said? How long will it be before it drags him out of the prison and places him on a pedestal?

*September 18, 1923.*

### III.

#### GANDHIISM AS OTHERS SEE IT.

It is a common saying that the outsider sees more of the game than those who take part in it. That, of course, does not mean that the most valuable judgments about a movement are necessarily those of foreign critics. For it all depends on the outsiders. They may, if they are unsympathetic, exaggerate its shady side and prefer to see only its more obvious failures ignoring the subtle and almost imperceptible benefits it may have conferred. Or, if enthusiastic, they may idealise the movement. Indeed, in space as in time, distance lends a charm. And in watching and evaluating a movement from afar, there is an element of certainty, of clarity and simplicity that on a closer view tend to disappear. The play of personal factors—vanities and stupidities, misunderstandings and trivialities—which come in the way of the organisation of great movements even though the higher spirit and the deeper potentialities are there can hardly be noticed by outsiders who see not the human weaknesses that set a limit to human aspirations but only the beautiful aspirations themselves. So it is with Non-co-operation, one of the most original national revolts that mankind has witnessed. For one thing, the personality of its originator is itself so unlike anything that one associates with a political revolutionary on the one hand, or a spiritual leader on the other, that he is, for foreign observers, what M. Rolland in his profound study of him calls “a living enigma.”\* It

is natural, therefore, that the gleanings from the American Press compiled by Miss Watson should contain not a few personal sketches of the Mahatma drawn by those who had taken the opportunity to see him while in India. Of these, an interesting sketch is by Myrtle and Gordon Law called *Gandhi, the Man* and a still more intimate one is a letter written by a Young American to his mother and entitled *Gandhi At First Hand*.\* The Laws found the Mahatma "as more completely master of himself than any man" they had met and got an impression not so much of power as of "wholesomeness and mental alertness and unusual idealism and conviction" though a psychologist being shown the Mahatma's photograph held that his chin indicated weakness of will! To the Young American, the Mahatma's profile seemed like a bust of Julius Cæsar or Houdin's grinning bust of Voltaire—"his expressions are quite fascinating . . . . at one time he wears an almost Mephistophelean look, again he is like the great good Pan, but never uninteresting or foolish." Particularly charming is the description of the Mahatma with a baby in his arms. But turn to politics. Here is a man who, as M. Rolland has carefully perceived, is "literally sick of the multitude that adores him," distrusts numbers and prefers to be in a minority; and yet he is placed at the helm of national affairs, made the supreme dictator of the national assembly and has, as Rev. Holmes in his admirable "Sermon After the Arrest" (published at the end of Miss Watson's anthology) observes, "a personal following greater in numbers and more devoted and disciplined in spirit than any man history has ever known." What a strange phenomenon is this! The Euro-

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\**Gandhi and Non-Violent Resistance*.—By Miss Blanche Watson (Ganesh & Co., Rs. 2/8.)

pean and American student of affairs who retains some intellectual curiosity or imaginative sympathy or moral sensitiveness wishes to know the personal career, the cultural make-up and the character of such a man.

Not less fascinating is the movement he led. Exhausted and disillusioned by violence and the hatreds and moral decay which violence breeds, the savants of the West turn with relief and with hope to a pacific movement seeking to achieve national emancipation by non-violent means. Here surely, they say, is new light from the East. Witness the impassioned and sincere tones in which M. Rolland, embittered and saddened by his experiences of the West, speaks about the hopes held out by the teachings of Gandhiji. "In the vast world which is fast falling into decay, no asylum, no hope. No great light," he says; and after dismissing curtly the Church and the Pacifists, asks "who will prove to them the existence and efficacy of this faith? And how can it be proved . . . in the only manner in which every faith can be proved and justified? In action!" The title of the chapter is the answer to the query—it is "The Message of the Mahatma." Almost in exactly the same words Rev. Holmes speaks of the Mahatma's work of spiritual redemption—"for in saving India, the Mahatma is saving the world." It is to save the Western civilisation from disintegration, Rev. Holmes suggests, that a Christ is reborn. Indeed, this thought that Non-co-operation is the Christ's way of winning freedom rather than Cæsar's occurs again and again in the articles of the American writers. But while we in India are apt to judge non-co-operation as a method of political emancipation, to the Western thinkers it connotes a deeper significance. What appears unique to them is the scale of the moral experiment

and its purpose. Non-resistance has hitherto been confined to individuals or isolated groups of individuals—to a Jesus or a heretical sect. Mahatma Gandhi's is the first genuine attempt at the application of this principle on a national scale and in relation to a national problem. It thus derives its importance from the fact that it is a mass movement based on a fundamentally individualistic idea, an effort to generate a positive social force by the negation of individual non-resistance. Nor is this all. Unlike many previous movements of non-resistance, Non-co-operation is not identified with other-worldly ambitions but embodies an active social principle and is meant to promote definite social effects. It is this technique of non-resistance as a method of social pressure and change that is Gandhiji's supreme contribution to mankind—a contribution not less vital to the world than Darwin's discovery or Tolstoy's philosophy. And it is this altered basis of social revolt, this challenge to the doctrine of physical force that constitutes the chief point of attraction to foreign observers. To them, the excellence of the principle is a sufficient passport to their admiration: Non-co-operators, on the other hand, are confronted with all the difficulties of organisation and working of that principle. The articles in Miss Watson's anthology being meant for American writers are descriptive and appreciative rather than critical or scientific. M. Rolland's study, needless to say, is of a much superior kind. His exposition of Gandhiji's philosophy is remarkable since it reveals the Mahatma to be not a mystic, claiming divine powers of revelation as English writers accuse him, but a man who constantly appeals to reason. Not less acute is his dissertation on the famous Tagore-Gandhi controversy from which M. Rolland concludes quite

correctly that Gandhiji is as much a universalist as Tagore but only in another way. Or take his description of the Bardoli decision suspending the movement in 1922 about which, says M. Rolland, Gandhiji became the conscience of India. Indeed, M. Rolland is so akin in spirit to Gandhiji that it is hardly surprising how well he has understood the features of the nationalist movement and imbibed the principles of the Mahatma. Of how many thinkers in this country can the same be said?

*May 4, 1924.*

## IV.

### ON THE FIFTY-SIXTH BIRTHDAY.

To-day is the fifty-sixth birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. But it is not a day of national rejoicing for in the public mind the fact that it is the eighth day of the Mahatma's fast overshadows everything else. To the learned-ignorant for whom politics is an unreasoning warfare of clashing wills or to the cynic for whom politics is an art of manœuvring for personal aggrandisement, it seems strange that the simple act of refusal of food by a national leader should generate such widespread and intense feelings among all sections of the Indian nation. Mahatma Gandhi's decision to fast has had more immediate and profound effects on the mass-mind than a Cabinet crisis in a parliamentary democracy and its gravity reminds one almost of a solemn declaration of war. For, it has a natural appeal in a country where asceticism has not yet lost its irresistible fascination. The unsophisticated among us flock to revere one who has willingly embraced poverty and renounced the pleasures of the flesh and the goods of the world and whose purity of conduct and moral energy are an example to his fellow-men. Are they often superstitious and duped by religious charlatans? Surely, they are not any more away from the light than those who gamble at race-courses, seek sensations in divorce cases and filthy newspaper stories, reserve their admiration for Jackie Coogans and burn incense at the altar of plutocracy. In the purely emotional admiration which vast masses of men feel to-day for the unique act of self-sacrifice which the Mahatma has per-

formed, there is a good and strong side—the recognition of a great personality, the appreciation of a supremely moral deed, the feeling of humility in the face of such unprecedented courage. They bow to character, not to the shallowness of wealth.

But though it is true that India has been very deeply moved by the decision of the Mahatma to deny himself even the bare nutrition that he allowed himself, it would be doing him an injustice and the nation a disservice if the action were viewed merely as a first-rate sensation or a moral "gesture." Its dramatic value, indeed, in making the nation realise vividly the fundamental importance and the need of social unity cannot be exaggerated. Here was a bewildered public that read of the occurrences of communal wrangles day after day—Delhi, Gulbarga, Kohat, Lucknow and a number of others following, one after another, in quick and unfailing succession. It read the news with sorrow, dismay and even a feeling of despair and helplessness like the one produced by the heart-rending tales of the distress of floods. At the same time it heard of fresh assaults on the bureaucratic ramparts, rising hopes of a united demand for national autonomy, a constant reiteration of the importance of inter-communal concord and even some endeavours towards its attainment. Nevertheless, the riots with all their consequent embitterment and distrust persisted. It seemed as though national politics had ceased to be vital or even interesting, as though the national struggle for emancipation was to be finally scotched by inter-communal discord. The Congress seemed powerless to control the rising surge of communalism and not the least because its leaders never made any consistent or vigorous efforts to stem it. All this was simply unbearable

to the soul of a man who has risen with all his moral strength against every attempt at the degradation of human conscience, whether it be due to the unjust violence of a governing system or the irrational and anti-social zeal of communal champions. As the Mahatma *could not bear* the denial of a moral purpose such as was involved in the virtual condonation of Dyerism, he *cannot now bear* the denial of a sense of national and human brotherhood, the negation of the spirit of fraternity and love such as is implied in inter-communal wrangles and riots. But his heroic act of self-abnegation for the cause of social unity would be in vain—whether he survives this terrible ordeal or not—unless the Indian nation imbibes the true significance of the Mahatma's prayer and penance. The conviction of the need of mutual trust and understanding and tolerance should become implanted in the national consciousness no less than in the daily practice of all men and women. In this only can the Mahatma have the spiritual reward that he needs even at the risk of losing his physical body, in this only can the nation offer the inadequate and feeble response to the tremendous moral service that manifests itself in such a noble deed.

The nation to-day has one anxiety and one hope—the anxiety for the coming days of self-inflicted suffering on the part of one who, always frail in body, is extremely weak in physique at present; the hope that either such satisfactory assurance will be forthcoming as to persuade the Mahatma to break his fast or that the nightmare of two more weeks will pass away—how long they seem now!—without any detrimental effects on the Mahatma's health. Maulana Mahomed Ali, the President of the Congress, has appealed to everyone to make to-day “a humble supplication” that

the Mahatma may be spared—not it, may be added, merely by the safe passage of these critical days but by a sincere and intelligent search for a real solution of communal differences and a harmonisation of various interests. Sincerely as one deplores the decision of the Mahatma, much as one would wish to see the fast ended as soon as possible, there is no one morally competent to judge that action. At last there has come a man who, as Emerson wished, had sufficient faith in the power of rectitude and a sufficient belief in the unity of things, to inspire him with the broad design of renovating society on the principle of right and love. And the instrument of this new reformer is a purification of the springs of conduct, a moral cleansing of the self rather than an erection of artificial restraints and mechanical readjustments. Aptly does the appeal of the leaders describe him as a symbol of national unity; for though the religions that flourish in India have various dialects and complexions, the Mahatma speaks the true voice of them all—the voice of human love, of mercy, of patient justice. If such a one is permitted to be a martyr to communal rancour and fray, the glory will be his, but the humiliation ours.

*September 24, 1924.*

## V

## TWO MEN.

It seems probable that our age will go down to history, despite the well-financed propaganda of British Imperialism and world-capitalism, as the age of Gandhi and Lenin—the two men who have endeavoured to achieve a synthesis in an analytic age, one in moral regeneration, the other in economic reconstruction. Both have been denounced as destroyers by the outraged imperialists and bourgeoisie of the world and yet the pre-eminence of both rests on something more solid than their capacity to destroy what they considered as evil impeding the realisation of their ideals. Both have had a philosophy of their own and a definite conception of the social system different from, and superior to, the one which exists : they have been system-builders in the realm of polities, men of action who are intellectual visionaries. Neither of them has cared for anything save public ends and both have been completely devoid of any self-seeking or avarice of power. Their faith—of the one in the moral order of the universe and of the other in Marxism —has made them calm during difficulties, heroic amid disasters, courageous and resolute on all occasions. To both, the amelioration of the economic condition of the masses seems the fundamental problem of modern times. But if the similarities between these two great world-figures are significant, the lines of contrast are not less marked. Their outlook and their temper have been different : their social theories and their methods are distinctly dissimilar. These differences owe their origin, in the first instance, to

divergencies in that inexplicable thing we call personality. But these variations in the personal factors apart, can we refer the dissimilarities of these two men to their respective-racial characters and national traditions? Are Gandhiji and Lenin what they are because they are Indian and Russian and because they are of fundamentally distinct national temperament? That is the fascinating question raised by the perusal of a stimulating paper on "The Comparative Influence of Current Thought in Russia and India upon the Future Development of Asia" read by Dr. Harry Ward, an American professor, at Peking and now published in the *Chinese Social and Political Science Review*. It is true that Dr. Ward's interesting analysis indirectly suggests this interrogation and it provides perhaps, no final answer to it. But it is not less helpful for that reason.

In judging a revolution, observed Aristotle in his *Politics*, it is essential to consider its provocative cause, its objective and its temper. It is useful to emphasise this view because Dr. Ward devotes his attention almost wholly to the variations in temper of the two movements to the exclusion of their other aspects. Yet Gandhism and Leninism—its social ideology and its active phases—have been both episodes in national struggles: the one against an inequitable alien domination, the other against a predatory landlordism backed by a corrupt Tsardom. Nor should the differences in the conditions of the two countries be ignored. Gandhiji has had to shatter, not merely an arrogant imperialism, but also the servile habits and the moral cowardice of an unarmed people: Lenin could defy the White battalions with an efficient army and the resources of the Soviet State. When these facts are borne in mind—when it is remembered, for example, that in India a disarmed

and disunited people was struggling for national freedom while the Russian Bolsheviks were aiming at an economic revolution unprecedented in history—the dissimilarities between the attitudes and methods of Gandhiism and Leninism fall into their proper proportions and are more justly evaluated. Such a perception of the historic background explains, for example, partly—but, of course, only partly—the familiar distinction noted by Dr. Ward in the methods of Gandhiji and Lenin: in their theory of social change by force *versus* non-resistance and their belief in the reorganisation of society by the tactics of power and its ruthless application or by the tactics of spiritual compulsion through individual suffering generating a mass force. Here it is necessary to differentiate between Gandhiji and Gandhiism. For, while to Gandhiji non-violence is a vital principle of his religious creed, the spontaneous appeal of his idea has been due as much to the emasculated state of the people as to their pacific impulses. Or take another interesting comparison instituted by Dr. Ward. He thinks that while the Indian movement is eclectic owing to the traditional tolerance of Hinduism and the Russian movement dogmatic because of its fanatical faith in Marxism, the relationship of Gandhiism and Leninism to the Western civilisation is curiously antithetic. The Indian Nationalist, Dr. Ward holds, likes the best in European thought and religion but dislikes its mechanism while the Russian Bolshevik likes European mechanism but dislikes its thought; the Indian, for example, would bow to Christianity and quote Romain Rolland but he would denounce industrialism while the Russian would borrow technical efficiency and machinery from Europe but reject its social philosophy and its religion. Yet here again the wide differences in national

conditions influence the directions of the two tendencies. The revolt against Western industrialism in India has been accentuated, if not created, by the fury of self-assertion roused by bureaucratic misrule. That is to say, industrialism, for whose introduction the alien political system is mainly responsible, seems an exotic growth and an instrument of economic exploitation; the adaptation of Western institutions has been less an intelligent assimilation of a people powerful enough to select and reject what they please than an indiscriminate imitation and a super-imposition on a subject nation. Lenin, on the contrary, desired to industrialise Russia without submiting to the yoke of foreign capitalists. But while the Soviet Government is free to make the experiment of acquiring industrial knowledge offered by the West without reproducing Western economic institutions, the Indian Nationalist is not; hence his attitude towards the West oscillates between academic discrimination and sheer resistance. If Indian thought is to be a vital contribution to the making of Asia, what India needs, above all, is the power to mould its institutional forms. The road to the development of a true Indian civilisation is the road of freedom.

*July 3, 1925.*

## VI

### ON THE SIXTY-THIRD BIRTHDAY.

To-day the nation observes the sixty-third birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. He is a guest of His Majesty's Government in a far-off country endeavouring to discover some satisfactory solution of the national problem. Last year, too, he was, at this time, a guest of His Majesty's Government, although in a different capacity. From Yeravda to St. James' Palace is a far cry; but to Gandhiji, the change makes no difference. Whether he is in a prison or in a palace, whether he dominates the Congress or his views are unacceptable to the majority of the political-minded classes, he is the same as ever—calm and patient and resolute. He is the living embodiment of the precept of the *Geeta* which asks Man to pursue one's goal regardless of happiness or misery, gain or loss, victory or defeat. Whether his mission in England is successful or not, he has dispelled the myth that had been assiduously created around his personality just as he has lent a touch of reality to the nebulous and interminable proceedings of the Round Table Conference. In England, Gandhiji had been represented as a morbid fanatic who is ignorant of the arts of politics and devoid of the essence of statesmanship. But that myth has now been shattered for ever. Gandhiji has placed the case of India without fear or hesitation and yet without bitterness or rancour. He has shown what the West with its diplomacy and political manœuvring forgets and what India with its slave-mentality has not yet sufficiently grasped, that truthfulness is the best tactics

and sincerity the supreme strategy. For that is the secret of the great apostle of Satyagraha who has been the power behind the throne of the Indian National Congress during the last ten years or more.

Some describe this national reliance on a single individual as a dictatorship. But although Gandhiji is, in this respect, occasionally compared to Mussolini, his dictatorship—if his supremacy won by moral means alone could be called as such—is qualitatively different from dictatorship as commonly understood and practised. The origins of his power in the social world are different from those of ordinary dictators just as its form is distinct. His power has been established and is maintained on principles and by methods which are entirely dissimilar from the technique of dictatorship. At the root of Gandhiji's dictatorship, there is no physical force, no violent compulsion but moral strength, almost divine selflessness, unique power of service and suffering and sacrifice: Gandhiji does not, like other dictators, try to destroy his opponents but endeavours to win them over; he does not, like the Fascist, give them castor-oil but extends to them love and understanding. Unlike a dictator, Gandhiji has voluntarily abdicated more than once and is always prepared to do so if he cannot win the consent of his people. Although he has disagreed with all the great Indian leaders on one occasion or another, he has never been known to have used one harsh word or imputed one unworthy motive to his political opponents. He completely disarms the opposition by taking it into his confidence. By keeping to the path of reason, he seeks to prove his desire for truth and not force the truth of his desire.

In him, there is an astounding combination of diver-

gent and even opposite qualities. He is firm and yet gentle, strong in his principles yet tolerant towards all, obstinate and yet open to conviction, loving yet terrible. He who cannot hurt a fly and would shed a tear if even a flower were trampled upon has been grim and almost merciless in his determination when leading a campaign. I would rather, he observed once, that this country perish from the earth than that it should continue in such a degraded state; when Mahadev Desai was arrested during the last movement, Gandhiji said that such sacrifice did not satisfy him and he would have been pleased if he had seen Mahadev's broken skull and blood-stained body. Truly, as the Sanskrit verse puts it, who can fathom the mind of the great which is softer than the flower and yet harder than the thunderbolt?

In this vast country with its diverse castes and creeds and economic interests, this one man has become the focal point of national aspirations. There is no doubt that rarely, if ever, a leader has had such a large personal following and so devoted and disciplined in its spirit as Gandhiji. What is the secret of this unique hold on the masses of men and women? His personality has a natural appeal in a country where moral asceticism has not yet lost its irresistible fascination. Despite the permeation of Western standards, we still bow to character, not to the shallowness of wealth. Moreover, Gandhiji is so great as a leader because he is his own most faithful follower. There is no gulf between profession and practice in his leadership. But this is not all. In these times of conflict and strife, when interest struggles against interest and when sections strive after their own narrow good, Gandhiji is the one centripetal force. Mill-owners and workers, the intelligent-

sia and the illiterate, merchants and peasants, atheists and devotees, men and women, old and young are drawn to him because he is a force of synthesis and harmony. It is true that there can be no progress without struggle, no harmony without conflict, no balance without resistance; and it is possible that complete harmony in the social world is unattainable. But perpetual conflict is also not in consonance with the demands of human nature. Just as man seeks light when surrounded by darkness or yearns for immortality when terrified by the prospect of annihilation, so when exhausted and disillusioned by ceaseless conflict, he strives for some lasting harmony and synthesis. Whether Gandhiji's mode of harmony is acceptable or not to all those who are attracted towards him, men instinctively feel that here is one who seeks to unify life and that, too, on a spiritual basis. Persons of divergent temperaments and principles and of mutually antithetic interests follow him and worship him because they intuitively recognise that he is the symbol of a fundamental unity, the personification of the ideal of enduring harmony. In the truest sense, he is to-day,

The pillar of a People's Hope,  
The centre of a World's Desire.

*October 2, 1931.*

## VII

### IS GANDHIJI A REVOLUTIONARY?

The tyranny of words is as powerful as it is subtle. People who profit by the existing order imagine that revolution involves bloodshed and that revolutionaries are criminal adventurers who cut throats and commit dacoities. Others presume that only those who throw bombs and shoot officials are real revolutionaries or that revolutionaries are to be found in Russia and perhaps, China about whom we could read in books on Marxism, Leninism and the Kuomintang. To the former, the word "revolution" seems terrible and they are scared away simply by such terms as "anarchists" or "Bolsheviks". To the latter, no revolution is conceivable except in terms with which they are familiar and violence seems a necessary corollary of revolution. But neither assumption is valid. Revolution is nothing so terrifying. It simply involves complete change and reversal of social conditions. Its difference as compared to evolution is one of degree, not of kind. Evolution itself is, in one sense, the outcome of a series of revolutions. On the other hand, those who identify revolution with a violent overthrow of the social organisation do not realise that revolution is not a method but a process, not a question of some particular ideology but a sudden and radical transformation of social ideals, values and conditions. As Mazzini said, "Every revolution is the work of a principle which has been accepted as a basis of faith." No revolution is worth its name which has not the inspiration of social idealism.

Judged by such criteria, it is not difficult to determine whether Gandhiji is a revolutionary. It is not merely his action in this sphere or that which entitles him to this description. His whole attitude towards life is revolutionary and the impact of his own personality and ideas on national life has been revolutionary in its effect. Whether it is politics, social conditions, economic activity, religion, art or the daily practice of ordinary men and women, the pervasive influence of Gandhiji is perceptible in innumerable ways. If we leave out the prophets of old, no single individual has ever transformed the outlook and habits of such a vast people with all their diverse castes, creeds, religious sects, economic interests as he has done. For what he has revolutionised is not merely the structure or machinery of society, not this institution or that custom but something deeper and more enduring—the minds and the hearts of men and women and children. Indeed, the fundamental revolution is a psychological and a moral revolution. A great revolutionary does not merely express the immediate grievances of the people but endeavours to refashion their ideals and to transform their scale of values. His very soul rises against the evils of the established order and he visualises a better society based on new moral principles which he seeks to translate into social facts. “All the great revolutionaries,” observes Mr. Delisle Burns, “have seen that the problem is moral and not economic; and that therefore the solution must be in the terms of morality.”\* Being a great revolutionary, therefore, Gandhiji is, above all, a moral prophet. His whole life is a moral protest against a social system based on an inhuman practice

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\**The Principles of Revolution.*

like "untouchability," an industrial system based on the acquisitive and the competitive motive, an imperial system based on domination and exploitation of weaker peoples. It is the denial of moral purpose involved in all these against which his conscience revolts. But if the provocative cause and the object of the revolutions he undertakes is moral, the method of execution of his revolution is no less moral. It baffles his supporters no less than his opponents; and it places every one on his defence—the lawyer and the merchant, the official and the student, the member of the legislature and the man who remains out of jail during his movement. For Gandhiji is not content merely to see visions; he wants to realise them in social terms. He strives to be not merely a Rousseau but also a Robespierre, not only a Tolstoy but also a Lenin. Gandhiji wants to prove his faith and, as Romain Rolland insists, the only manner in which every faith can be proved and justified is in action. Like all true revolutionaries, therefore, he seeks to make revolution positive and constructive. The conception and execution of Gandhiji's revolution is qualitatively different from a bloody revolution; but its purposes, its temper and its effects are, in essence, revolutionary. The revolutionary leader, wrote Morley of Cromwell, treads the path of fire. Gandhiji has renounced the recognised mode of revolution no less than the gospel of force which has been its basis. Yet he has treaded, like every revolutionary, on the edge of the abyss and has taken risks both with himself and his people for attaining his goal; for no revolution can achieve anything valuable without risks. But revolution, as Karl Marx argued, is an art. And since every art has a technique of its own, the art of revolution has its science, however inadequate our realisation of it.

Gandhiji has by means of experiments developed a technique of his own revolution consistent with his ideals and principles and suitable to the conditions of the country and the needs of the time.

Take, for example, politics. Non-violence is itself a revolutionary idea just as its operation has revolutionised national life. It is his unique contribution not only to Indian but to world-politics. It constitutes a rejection of physical force as a means of achieving national emancipation and in resorting to it, the people have refused to adopt either political mendicancy or intermittent violence as methods for obtaining Swaraj. The practice of a non-violent policy has not only given vitality and strength to the nation; it has also placed those who resist it on a definitely lower moral plane. He has created a positive and militant force out of negation and self-denial such as non-payment or prohibition or boycott. He has roused a people, fallen into slough, to a consciousness of their rights and their self-respect and has instilled into them a will to freedom more intense and widespread than ever before while annihilating from their minds the false fear of power and authority. Like a real revolutionary, he has transfused the inertia of the masses into active sympathy and eager yearning as he has transformed their grievances into national demands. But this is not all. There is a similar revolution he has achieved in our conception of politics and political organisation. It is since Gandhiji's advent that we are realising that politics for a subject-people is not the diversion of dilettantes but an obligation on workers, not a matter of career but a problem of service. This change is reflected in the character of political organisation and agitation. The Congress has ceased to

be the Christmas week-end pastime of busy lawyer-politicians and has become the serious and absorbing occupation of whole-time servants of the nation.

In the economic sphere, Gandhiji has challenged the economic dogmas and criteria of economic progress derived from the West which we have at times mechanically accepted as progressive notions. We are much less certain to-day about the beneficial effects of wholesale and rapid industrialisation of India than we were a decade back and one of the principal factors in this scepticism is Gandhiji. Whether the apostles of large-scale production agree with his scheme of social economy or not, there is no doubt that he has through his Khadi cult made the much-abused phrase "dignity of labour" a reality and has taught us to go back to that essential simplicity and that ascetic attitude towards possessions without which progress is apt to be but a feverish round of futilities. Gandhiji has discussed problems of production in human terms, not in terms of profit. But despite this protest against the domination of economic motive—or perhaps because of it—the amelioration of the economic condition of the masses seems a fundamental problem to Gandhiji. His constant anxiety has been to discover a panacea for the evil of poverty which is the one standing riddle before every social revolutionary.

In the matter of social reform, Gandhiji has achieved even during the course of last one year what a generation of social reformers had been unable to attain in respect of elevation of the status of woman or in the way of breaking the fetters of castes and social barriers. The awakening of Indian women and the constructive and militant part they have played in national life is a revolution besides which the so-called revolutions involving de-

thronement of kings or beheading of dictators by their rivals or a mutiny of the army pale into insignificance. Unfortunately, our sense for dramatic situation often blurs our vision. In the pursuit of concrete objects and material ideas, we are prone to lose sight of the impalpable but vital forces which sway mankind and determine their destinies. The fetters of caste and creed have been more effectively broken in Congress camps and ashrams and jails than by any number of inter-communal dinner. For, this social revolution had not only a purpose more comprehensive than mere reform but a personality to inspire and vitalise it. The moral evil of "untouchability" has been brought home poignantly to everyone and its abolition has been made a plank in the national programme by Gandhiji. He has revolutionised the attitude to it so radically that few can now openly defend its equity or necessity, whatever the actual practice. The social impulse which he has generated has stimulated numerous struggles for social justice and purification as at Vaikom or Guru-ka-Bagh or Nasik just as it has radiated the gospel of social welfare all through the land. In fine, the forces Gandhiji has set in motion, whether in the realm of politics or economic relationship or social life, are so manifold, so far-reaching and so subtle that it is not yet possible for us even to comprehend adequately their full significance. For, we are still on the threshold of the unique revolution which the great moral prophet of India has initiated.

*October 8, 1931.*

## VIII

### THE MORAL PROPHET.

To-day, according to the English Calender, is the sixty-fourth birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. It was doubtful a few days ago when his invaluable life was still hovering on the verge of death owing to his self-imposed ordeal whether the nation would be able to observe this occasion at all. The grim resolve of the great Prisoner of Yervada created deep and intense feelings all over the country and brought the best elements of the national character into play. For argue as we may, Gandhiji embodies in his person the national aspiration of freedom and equality : in him are centred the hopes and the faith of the millions. He inspires not only deep reverence but sincere affection in innumerable hearts. To many, his disappearance would connote the extinction of national hopes. It was a calamity too dreadful even to contemplate. Hence it was that Gandhiji's terrible penance revitalised national energies in a moment and stirred even the stagnant pools of Hinduism. It brought together Congressmen and Liberals, leaders of caste-Hindus and of the so-called "depressed" classes, millionaires and the masses, the orthodox and the heterodox in a concerted effort to solve the problem for which Gandhiji was prepared to lay down his life. Perhaps, it is suffering only that unites. It is only under the stress of a war that a nation realises its entity : it was only an impending tragedy that made the people and its representatives united in a common task. From one end of India to another, the whole nation pulsated with one anxiety and

one hope—the anxiety for the precious life of Gandhiji who always frail in body was extremely weak when he decided to immolate himself and the hope that by a satisfactory and unanimous solution of the question of representation of the “depressed” classes, Gandhiji would be able to break the fast without any detrimental effects on his health. One could almost hear the heart-throbs of the people. The result was the Poona settlement which is a great example of the value of national unity and constitutes a landmark on the road to national self-determination. It is Gandhiji who has once again shown the way.

For Gandhiji, however, fasting is not to be succeeded by feasting; he does not pray for a while and then prey on his neighbours during the rest of the time. His is a completely dedicated life; it is a living sermon in service, sacrifice and selflessness. Speaking about Jesus Christ, Mr. John Middleton Murry has observed that actually the tragedy of Jesus arose directly from the incompatibility of his ethical passion with his environment, the established theocracy of Judaism. Since his ethical passion was himself, that is, he was totally surrendered to it, he had to pursue his path. Once he saw, quite clearly, that he could not make men understand his gospel, he prepared himself for the final sacrifice, which was inevitable. That he saw it was inevitable, and yet endured it to the end, was his supreme victory.\* Precisely the same moral passion moves Gandhiji. Fortunately, for the nation at any rate, the disaster has been averted. But to him, it is a matter of indifference whether he lives or he dies; for the ultimate sacrifice seems inevitable and the spiritual victory, certain. Those who seek to examine Gandhiji’s conduct by the

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\**The Necessity of Communism.*

ordinary political yardstick fail to understand its significance : those who conceive politics as an art of personal or even national aggrandisement might scoff at him. But he is beyond and above the narrow categories, the cynical standards of such politics. For he is a moral prophet of this age. The tragedy of every prophet has been that he has expressed himself in forms of activity which are in dis-harmony with the social system and are disapproved by those who wield social power. But to the prophet, his own sacrifice appears not a disaster but a fulfilment, since the ultimate truths for whose establishment he strives are accepted by his willing self-immolation. It is easy to scorn the spirituality and the disinterestedness which distinguish Gandhiji's consecration to his moral ideals. But unique evidence of its practical efficacy has been provided by the conversion of Dr. Ambedkar. He swore by separate electorates and was personally bitter towards Gandhiji even after the commencement of the fast; and yet his heart was touched by the voluntary suffering undergone by the apostle of non-violence.

It has been contended that the issue on which Gandhiji was determined to sacrifice his life was a comparatively minor one. It might be a question of transitional arrangement so far as the constitutional scheme is concerned ; but it involved, in Gandhiji's conception, not only disruption of Hindu society but political segregation of the "untouchables." It was unbearable to the soul of a man who has risen with all his moral strength against every attempt at the degradation of human conscience. As Gandhiji could not bear the denial as a moral purpose involved in the virtual condonation of Dyerism which led to his entry in Congress politics, just as he could not bear the negation of the

spirit of fraternity implied in inter-communal wrangles and riots which led to his Delhi fast, so he could not bear the idea of relegating the untouchables to a status of permanent inferiority and dividing them from the Hindu fold. And when Gandhiji cannot bear anything, he resists it with all the strength he is capable of, which, as all the world knows and has again and again experienced, is not small. For him, there is no compromise between the forces of light and the forces of darkness; once the sharp line is drawn, the struggle is obligatory and unrelenting and final.

It is argued by those who are stunned by Gandhiji's amazing success in having the communal award modified from behind the prison bars that it amounts to moral coercion and constitutes a virtual dictatorship. Surely, supremacy won by moral means and based on the spontaneous love and reverence of millions cannot be described as dictatorship commonly understood. At the root of Gandhiji's power, there is no physical force, no violent compulsion but moral strength, complete disinterestedness, pure devotion to fellow-men. Gandhiji does not, like other dictators, try to destroy his opponents but endeavours to win them over: he seeks to capture not their bodies but their hearts. If this conquest by self-abnegation is to be described as force, then words have no meaning. If this is force, all religious emotion is based on force and all human love on coercion. Gandhiji's method is the very opposite of force. It is something essentially spiritual. It belongs to the domain of the mind and of the conscience and demands, as it concedes, the maximum of freedom. It lives in experiment and self-improvement. It seeks to substitute will for violence, moral energy for muscular strength, love for fear in the scheme of life. It respects neither traditions nor

authority. It is free as air. It is the very antithesis of force which moves on the solid ground, is irrational and is founded on might and fear. After all, if Right is to be Might, Right must have vitality and must prove itself. Gandhiji realises clearly, what we feel obscurely, that finally the summons is upon the individual man, that it is only the faith of the martyr which moves the mountains of ignorance and superstition and hatred. It is the individual man who should answer that summons by anticipating the revolution in his own heart and mind, by making his spiritual vision issue in a new potency for good in the world of existence. That has been the gospel of all the prophets. It is the gospel of Gandhiji.

*October 2, 1932.*

## IX

### THE FIERCE ORDEAL.

To-day begins another fast of Gandhiji, another “pilgrimage of pain”.\* The public is in a state of perplexity mingled with deep anxiety. Few can comprehend the motives of this fast, fewer still can anticipate its effects, none can contemplate it with equanimity; all have misgivings and unhappy forebodings. What is this “inner voice” which impels and even compels such a terrible penance? Why does Gandhiji risk his precious and invaluable life all of a sudden and for reasons which are impossible to fathom? Is self-immolation an efficacious means of social regeneration and emancipation? These and other interrogations disturb many throughout the land, to whom the aetiology of this fast is inscrutable and the issues involved in it inexplicable. But national anxiety is intense and widespread. For, Gandhiji in his person embodies the national aspiration for freedom and equality; in him are centred the hopes and the faith of the millions. His disappearance is a calamity too dreadful even to contemplate.

Yet argue as we may about its causation, we all look humble and insignificant in the face of such a fierce ordeal as Gandhiji has decided to undergo. Regret as we may such a decision and apprehend as we do its possible consequences, none of us, I feel, is morally competent to pass an ethical judgment upon the deed itself. Even those who are confounded by this extraordinary method of action and who

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\*Shreemat Padmaja Naidu in the *Epic Fast*.

question its utility, even those who doubt the meaning of the "inner voice" which prompts it must need understand, in all humility and reverence, its deeper implications and its spiritual significance. For let us never forget that it is no ordinary courage, no common moral discipline which are exhibited in such a grim resolve. Nor is he an ordinary mortal who resorts to this course. In Bernard Shaw's famous drama, when St. Joan pleads that she hears the voices of the angels and the soldiers sneer that it is her imagination, St. Joan beautifully replies that that is always how angels speak. If the imagination of a pure maiden can be the medium for the speech of the angels, who would scorn the moral consciousness of a man whose life is completely dedicated to his fellow-beings? Who dare describe the innermost promptings of a moral prophet as the mocking echoes of his imagination or the call he hears and responds to with his whole being as a complete delusion?

Indeed, Gandhiji's peculiar method still retains a unique appeal in a country which has a fascination for asceticism whose final consummation is the willing surrender of life. For no love is complete without sacrifice. "My fast I want to throw in the scale of justice", declared Gandhiji during his September fast: "If I had anything more to give, I would throw in that also but I have nothing more than my life". The intensity of feelings which these few words reveal and the pathos which lies hidden in their simple grandeur make one almost speechless. They are sublime. We, as a people, are so fallen, so self-centred and so timid that we cling incessantly to life and are in constant dread of death. The Westerner is, in this at least, our superior. He is prepared to die for his nation or a cause, he is not afraid to risk his life in pursuit of scientific truth

or even in sheer adventure. But we, as Shakespeare said of cowards, die many times before our death. We are all the time afraid—afraid of parents and preceptors, of the caste and the rulers, but, above all, of death. Because we cannot embrace death, we cannot live fearlessly. Because Gandhiji is ever prepared to die, he lives so freely and nobly. To renounce is, in the spiritual sense, to reconquer. But to Gandhiji, even his own life, the most fundamental thing a man can give, does not seem an adequate sacrifice, a sufficient compensation for the injustice done to the “untouchables.” Sincerity of purpose, consecration to moral ideals, devotion to mankind cannot go further. The final surrender of self, which we cannot practise even to a small extent, seems a joyous recreation to him. His own end seems not a disaster but a fulfilment of the purpose for which he lives and strives. To attain his ideal, he challenges death itself.

Nevertheless, the deeper questions haunt us and the ultimate issues elude us. Is fasting a desirable means of spiritual conversion, an effective means of social reform? Does it not have an element of coercion and does not this reliance on the “inner voice” involve a subordination of reason to mere impulse? The sceptic doubts, the cynic scoffs. Little do they know the pangs of hunger, the determination to starve day after day. All academic discussion seems shallow and almost futile in the face of one brave act. As Pyarelal in his *Epic Fast* feelingly puts it, “Among the dim path days of human action, a mortal can only grope his way. But he dare not sit by the roadside. It is better to walk with bleeding feet than to be left in the outer darkness.” If Gandhiji’s method of self-abnegation is to be described as force, then all spiritual values are void. If

righteousness is to rule the world, it must assert itself and must be positive. If Right is to be Might, Right too must have vitality and must prove itself in action. Gandhiji has been endeavouring all his life to discover a technique whereby Right can generate enough strength to resist and conquer Might. That is the objective of his experiments with Truth. Non-violence cannot become a moral equivalent of war without the readiness to lay down one's life. When he describes his cultivated and elevated moral conscience as the "inner voice," let us always remember that the ultimate criterion of virtue and conduct of a truly great man is his own conscience. No mere rational theory can completely explain the great renunciation of Buddha or the March to Calvary : yet mankind instinctively bows before these ultra-rational acts. Speaking of Jesus Christ, Mr. John Middleton Murry has observed that Jesus sacrificed himself because his ethical passion, to which he was totally surrendered, could not be reconciled with his environment. That this sacrifice was rendered inevitable by the incompatibility of Jesus with the established theocracy of Judaism was a tragedy : that he saw it was inevitable and yet endured it to the end was his supreme victory. Precisely similar is the moral passion which moves Gandhiji. On such a plane, the moral conscience has a volition and a rationality of its own ; on such a plane, even the distinction between giving one's life and taking it is blurred because the difference ceases when once the self is totally surrendered. The prophets hear a call and seek to answer it : describe this call as the "inner voice" or conscience or profound conviction or intense feeling or what you will. The fact is greater than the words. Gandhiji feels, as did the prophets before him, that the final summons is upon

the individual man and that he has to respond to that summons—with his life, if necessary. We can only stand in silent reverence in the presence of such awful courage, such stern determination, such relentless will :

“Others abide our question—Thou are free !  
We ask and ask—Thou smilest and art still  
Out-topping knowledge !”

*May 8, 1933.*



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